



## Residential air-conditioning and climate change: Voices of the vulnerable

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**Author(s):** Farbotko C, Waitt G  
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### Abstract:

Issue addressed: Decreasing the risk of heat-stress is an imperative in health promotion, and is widely accepted as necessary for successful adaptation to climate change. Less well understood are the vulnerabilities that air-conditioning use exacerbates, and conversely, the need for the promotion of alternative strategies for coping with heat wave conditions. This paper considers these issues with a focus on the role of air-conditioning in the everyday life of elderly public housing tenants living alone, a sector of the population that has been identified as being at high risk of suffering heat stress. Methods: A vulnerability analysis of domestic air-conditioning use, drawing on literature and policy on air-conditioning practices and ethnographic research with households. Results: Residential air-conditioning exacerbated existing inequities. Case studies of two specifically selected low-income elderly single person households revealed that such households were unlikely to be able to afford this 'solution' to increasing exposure to heat waves in the absence of energy subsidies. Residential air-conditioning use during heat waves caused unintended side-effects, such as system-wide blackouts, which, in turn, led to escalating electricity costs as power companies responded by upgrading infrastructure to cope with periods of excess demand. Air-conditioning also contributed to emissions that cause climate change. Conclusions: Residential air-conditioning is a potentially maladaptive technology for reducing the risk of heat stress.

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### Resource Description

#### Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Temperature

**Temperature:** Extreme Heat

#### Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Urban

#### Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

# Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

Non-United States

**Non-United States:** Australasia

**Health Impact:** ☒

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Injury, Other Health Impact

**Other Health Impact:** heat stress

**Mitigation/Adaptation:** ☒

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

**Other Projection Model/Methodology:** Discussion only

**Population of Concern:** A focus of content

**Population of Concern:** ☒

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Elderly, Low Socioeconomic Status

**Resource Type:** ☒

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

**Resilience:** ☒

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

**Timescale:** ☒

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

**Vulnerability/Impact Assessment:** ☒

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content